

**Illinois River Coordinating Council
May 7, 2008 Meeting Minutes
Illinois State Library Room 403
Springfield, Illinois
1:00 pm**

Call to Order:

Marc Miller, Office of Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn, called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm, and welcomed members and guests.

Roll call:

Miller called the roll:

Citizen Members

Lee Bunting, Illinois Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Claudia Emken, The Nature Conservancy of Illinois; Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau; Daphne Mitchell; Richard Worthen.

State Agency Members

Leslie Sgro, Deputy Director of Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Jared Thornley, Illinois Department of Agriculture; Terry Weldin-Frisch, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity; Marcia Willhite, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Ex-Officio Members

Ron Fisher, US Fish and Wildlife Service; George E. Groschen, US Department of Interior – US Geological Survey; Don King, USDA Farm Service Agency; William Kruidenier, University of Illinois, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Services; Colonel Robert Sinkler; US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District; Christine Urban, US Environmental Protection Agency.

Approval of Minutes

January 24, 2008 minutes were approved unanimously. No revisions requested. Willhite moved to approve, Bunting seconded.

Member Comment:

Willhite, IEPA, reported that the Condition of Water Resources Report is out and currently open for public comments. A copy of the report can be found on IEPA's website.

Emken, TNC, stated that University of Illinois at Springfield's Field Station at Emiquon is open. It is an impressive field station with 2,000 acres of water quality facilities.

Emken also invited participants to the open house at the Franklin Farm in the Mackinaw River watershed on June 11th. The farm demonstrates innovative farming practices.

Emken also mentioned that TNC in Illinois will partner in a new coalition with Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership to restore the wetlands protection lost in the 2001 Supreme Court decision regarding the Clean Water Act.

Bunting, IASWCD; Mcleese, USDA-NRCS; and Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau, thanked the Lieutenant Governor for his efforts to help restore agriculture funding. Miller asked for future updates concerning SWCD or extension funding and requested they inform the Lt. Governor's Office.

Mike Conlin, Illinois DNR, gave an update on the fish barrier and WRDA. WRDA allows Barrier 1 to be made permanent, and the construction of permanent Barrier 2. It also authorizes a feasibility study and the study of other long term options for alternative barriers. The USACE and Coast Guard have started a public outreach campaign to keep people out of water in the areas surrounding the barriers due to the risk of electric shock.

George Groschen thanked all the agencies, specifically IEPA, who sent a letter to congress for restoration of the proposed cuts to the National Water Quality Assessment Program that funds two studies on the Illinois River.

Illinois River Symposium: Update and Next Steps – Brad McMillan, Bradley University

Various stakeholder groups came together for the March 7 *Protecting the Illinois River, A Time for Action* to discuss the Illinois River and implementation of WRDA's \$1.71 billion for restoration and over \$2 billion for navigation. Presentations at the conference included TNC's capture of all the progress made in the Illinois River watershed and Colonel Sinkler's report on the Illinois River's restoration effort as a national model.

A congressional delegation will work with USACE and IRCC to create an Illinois River working group. A meeting has been arranged to talk about structure, process, and appointees. The August IRCC meeting will release recommendations for appointees and the structure of the working group. Projects for next year's WRDA will be chosen based on scientific evidence and where projects can make the longest term environmental restoration impacts. Illinois will ask for an additional \$100 million to fund more Illinois River projects. A prioritized list of projects needs to be handed to the WRDA congressional delegation by January 1, 2009.

Illinois River Restoration – Colonel Robert Sinkler, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District

Construction money was obtained this year for the USACE to begin the Peoria Lake Island Project. The project will be accomplished through the partnership of USACE, federal, state, and other private organizations. Marshall Plumley, USACE, added that progress on 16 critical watershed projects is heading towards implementation.

The Illinois River Restoration Plan won the National Ecosystem Restoration Award from the American Planning Organization. Also, the USACE developed a handbook of best business practices for each river basin in the upper Mississippi. A brochure on the lessons learned in creating the plan for the Illinois River basin was created to be applied to and referenced in other river basin restoration projects.

A conference will be held by River Action to showcase the success of the Illinois River Basin restoration on August 21-23 in Moline, IL. The conference hopes to guide leaders in other river basins to successful restoration plans.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts: Funding Local Conservation - Rich Nichols, Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Funds for FY 08 for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) were held by the Governor, but thanks to efforts of the Lt. Governor, and others, all funds in FY 08 budget have been released. Lawrence County SWCD closed and they need to repay a loan before opening back up. Scott County SWCD closed but will bring employees back once funds are received. Stark County is weighing its options; they might need to take out loan before money comes through. SWCD have a major impact in downstate Illinois and the agricultural economy. SWCD's have been asked by the Governor to find an alternative source of funds and prepare to be removed from the General Revenue Fund. SWCD may call on IRCC for assistance on functioning without General Revenue Funds.

The Lt Governor thanked everyone involved with SWCD, UI Extension, 4-H, and other conservation programs. The people of Illinois appreciate the work Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide.

RiverWatch – Vera Bojic, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center

RiverWatch is a program that trains volunteers all over the state to monitor water quality data of streams and rivers. It was initiated in 1995 by DNR. In 2004 the program lost funding but with the help of Lt Governor Pat Quinn and Friends of the Fox River, the program was able to continue on a small scale. In 2006, the program was adopted by National Great Rivers Research and Education Center.

Last year, the McKnight foundation gave a \$50,000 grant to the program, which allowed RiverWatch to hold numerous workshops, training over 50 new volunteers, two training assistants were hired, and over 200 volunteers collected 86 datasets. RiverWatch partnered with several organizations, including the UI Extension. The Extension partnership allows them to set up training in many counties throughout the state. They were also able to set up two permanent training locations, one in Chicago and one

downstate.

The RiverWatch database has been completed with the help of the Illinois Natural History Survey. It is the first database in the state where volunteers can enter data and search collected data. The 13 years of collected data needs to be uploaded to the database.

The Lt. Governor announced that in conjunction with National Great River Research and Education Center, the University of Illinois and Lewis and Clark Community College will be hosting the *Many Waters, Many Lands: 2008 International River Symposium on River Management and Ecosystem Services*. The symposium will be held September 22-23, 2008 and guests will discuss the economic benefits of proper river management and how the study of ecosystem services can influence policy.

Prescription Pill and Drug Disposal Program – Mike Patton, Executive Director of the Illinois Pharmacists Association

The AP reported that prescription and over the counter drugs in our nation's waterways is a widespread problem. While there is no way to prohibit all drugs from entering the waterways and drinking water, there are strategies for diminishing excess amounts. The Prescription Pill and Drug Disposal Program (P2D2 Program) was created by Pontiac High School students and is a partnership between several local pharmacies and the school in Pontiac to take back prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

The first step will be pharmacist education to provide people with proper disposal instructions. There is no standard method to disposal and some drugs are controlled substances that need protection from diversion. There is a need to develop a standardize disposal method across the nation. Take-back programs will be difficult to implement because various laws prohibit most pharmacies from taking pills back.

Mitchell commented that Chicago hospitals need guidance in trying to address the problem of proper drug disposal. Nurses and doctors often flush unused medicines down the drain. There are nonprofit organizations that can take unused medicines from hospitals to donate to poor countries and individuals.

Willhite, Illinois EPA, commented that IEPA has a fact sheet on proper disposal of medications on its website and next month they will report on the presence of drugs in Illinois drinking water.

Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau, added that the Bureau has been trying to encourage youth organizations to talk with local pharmacies about taking back prescriptions.

The Lt Governor added that a subcommittee of IRCC should be formed to address this issue.

State and Federal Legislation Update

Miller informed everyone that the Farm Bill is in conference committee. Currently, the Conservation Title has a new \$4 billion in baseline funding which include CRP, CREP, wetlands, and other conservation programs. Everyone should keep in touch with representatives to push the conservation agenda.

Miller added that new language is needed for WRDA 2009. The new bill should allow USACE to partner with scientific surveys and others for construction projects. Projects could still be better organized to promote funding.

Other Business

Brian Anderson was introduced as the new chief of the Illinois Natural History Survey.

Miller bid farewell to Jeremy Kruidenier on the Lt. Governor's staff and thanked him for all his hard work planning the IRCC meetings, It's Our River Day events, and other water-related tasks.

Miller announced that It's Our River Day will be Sept 20th. It will be planned by Jamie Caston in the Lt Governor's office in collaboration with other organizations.

Public Comments Period

Eric Schank of Ducks Unlimited announced half a million dollars of challenge grant funds will go to Illinois River restoration. Three project sites, totaling about 1,000 acres, will go into public stewardship.

Perna of IDNR brought up that her constituents request more frequent mowing on river flood walls. With high gas prices mowing may be too expensive. Can USACE explore the idea of natural landscaping on levees? This would increase riparian habitat and decrease costs associated with levee maintenance. Colonel Sinkler responded that USACE encourages vegetative growth, but they will look into what kinds of solutions can address this and will address it at the next meeting.

John Marlin, Waste Management and Research Center, is working with Living Lands and Waters on a beneficial river sediment reuse project in Sturgeon Bay at New Boston, Illinois. Sediment core sampling results indicate the mud will be very good for distribution in area as an amendment to the soil.

Marlin also mentioned The Duck Island project is waiting on IEPA to send a permit for construction. The China Dredging Association is interested in copying the Mud to Parks program.

Adjourn

Miller adjourned the meeting at 2:45.